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EXCISE

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Saigon 3150 8/15/67

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ACTION SS 70

INFO NSCE 00,CIAE 00,SSO 00,DODE 00,USIE 00,NSAE 00,CCO 00,/070 W

O R 151115Z AUG 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4635
INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE 2169
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3801
AMCONSUL DANANG 729
CINCPAC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 3150

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJECT: TRAN VAN HUONG PUBLICLY CHARGES GOVERNMENT WITH RIGGING ELECTION.

1. TRAN VAN HUONG HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE CONTINENTAL HOTEL ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 15 TO EXPOSE CHARGES THAT

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THE GOVERNMENT IS USING THREATS AND PRESSURES TO INSURE THE VICTORY OF THE THIEU-KY SLATE. A LIST OF ALLEGED SPECIFIC INSTANCES WAS PRESENTED. HUONG SAID THAT HE INTENDS TO GO ON THE JOINT CAMPAIGN VISIT TO BIEN HOA TOMORROW, BUT HE WARNED THAT IF UNFAIR AND ILLEGAL GOVERNMENT TACTICS CONTINUE HE WILL RECONSIDER HISCANDIDACY. HE REFERRED WITH SOME BITTERNESS TO GENERAL THANG'S STATEMENT OF AUGUST 13 (SAIGON 3050), AND SAID THAT IF THIS IS THE WAY KY AND THANG FEEL, THE CIVILIANCANDIDATES ARE PREPARED TO STEP ASIDE AND ALLOW THE ARMY TO RUN EVERYTHING. HEALSO NOTED THAT IN HIS FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE HE HAD SAID HE MIGHT BE WILLING

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REVIEWED BY Evan Ingalls DATE 10/7/81
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TO SERVE AS PRIME MINISTER IF THIEU-KY WERE TO WIN'SAIGON 2341, HE SAID HE HASNOW DECIDEDTHAT HE WOULD REFUSE TO SERVE IN THEIR GOVERNMENT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

2. THE PRESS CONFRERENCE WAS SKILLFULLY ORGANIZED AND WELL ATTENDED BY BOTH VIETNAMESE AND FOREIGN PRESS. ALL STATEMENTS WERE HANDED OUT IN BOTH VIETNAMESE AND ENGLISH, AND THE SEVEN OR EIGHT PRINCPAL SPEAKERS EACH HAD A LARGE AND NEATLY PAINTED NAME PLATE TO HELP IDENTIFY HIM. THE QUESTION

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AND ANSWER PERIOD WAS ALSO TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH.

3. HUONG OPENED THE CONFERENCE WITH A RELATIVELY MILD AND UNSPECIFIC STATEMENT. HE WAS FOLLOWED BY MAI THO TRUYEN WHO READ A LIST OF SPECIFIC INSTANCES IN WHICH THE AUTHORITIES ALLEGEDLY USED THREATS AND PRESSURES TO INTIMIDATE VOTERS AND CAMPAIGN WORKERS. TRUYEN ALSO READ A LETTER FROM AN UNNAMED HUONG SUPPORTER IN VINHBINH PROVINCE. THREE MRS ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES (BANH NGOC QUI, LAM PHI DIEU, TRIE VAN TUAT) MADE BRIEF STATEMENTS ALLEGING GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AGAINST THEM AND THEIR CO-WORKERS IN THE HUONG CAMPAIGN. HUONG THEN COMMENTED IN STRONG TERMS ON THESE CHARGES AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THE PRESS CONFERENCE ENDED WITH A PROLONGED QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD IN WHICH NGUYEN NGOC AN AND NGUYEN VAN TRUONG AS WELL AS HUONG AND MAI THO TRUYEN FIELDED QUESTIONS.

4. THE CHARGES OF GOVERNMENT ELECTION RIGGING INCLUDED SUCH THINGS AS POLICE AGENTS FOLLOWING CAMPAIGN WORKRS IN ORDER TO FRIGHTEN THEM AND THEIR CONTACTS; VEILED THREATS OF TRANSFERS,

PGE 4 RUMJIR 3150 S E C R E T
HARDSHIPS, AND EVEN VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVIL SERVANTS WHO FAVOR THE HUONG TICKET; IMPROPER USE OF GOVERNMENT FACILITIES TO ASSIST THIEU-KY CAMPAIGN WORKERS (THE LETTER FROM THE HUONG SUPPORTER IN VINH BINH SAYS THAT "THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE-KY-THIEU TICKET

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MAY USE VIETNAMESE HELICOPTERS AS WELL AS HELICOPTERS OF THE ALLIED FORCES IN TRAVELLING FROM THE PROVINCE TO SAIGON OR TO THE DISTRICTS"); AND INSTRUCTIONS TO CIVIL SERVANTS TO WORK FOR THIEU-KY. HUONG SUMMED UP BY SAYING THAT DESCRIBING ALL SUCH TRICKS WOULD TAKE THE REST OF THE DAY. HE THEN ADDED TWO MORE GENERAL CHARGES: THE MILITARY HAVE BEEN ISSUED TWO SETS OF VOTING CARDS, ONE AT THEIR HOME ADDRESS AND ANOTHER TO THEIR MILITARY UNIT, SO THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO VOTE TWICE; IN REMOTE AND INSECURE DISTRICTS THE HAMLET AND VILLAGE CHIEFS WILL SIMPLY CAST THE BALLOTS OF ALL RESIDENTS WITHOUT CONSULTING THEM. (WE ARE SENDING VIA SEP TEL THE TEXT OF THE LIST OF CHARGES READ BY MAI THO TRUYEN, THE LETTER FROM THE HUONG CAMPAIGN WORKER IN VINH BINH, AND HUONG'S OPENING REMARKS.)

5. LATE ON THE EVENING OF AUGUST 14[ ]SOUGHT b-1 ed

OUT TWO EMBOFFS SEPARATELY AND DISCUSSED WITH THEM THE COMING PRESS CONFERENCE. BOTH EMBOFFS POINTED OUT IN STRONG TERMS THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF SUCH A PRESS CONFERENCE ON AMERICAN OPINION. THEY URGED THAT HUONG FIRST MAKE HIS COMPLAINTS ABOUT PRESSURES AND THREATS KNOWN TO THIEU AND KY PRIVATELY AND SEEK A BEHIND-THE-SCENES RESOLUTION OF THE ALLEGED DIFFICULTIES OF HIS CAMPAIGN WORKERS.[ ]RECOGNIZED THE DANGERS IN MAKING SUCH CHARGES PUBLIC, BUT HE SAID THAT THERE IS NO HOPE FOR VIET NAM'S FUTURE UNLESS THE ELECTION IS FAIR. WHEN EMBOFF NOTED THAT CHARGES OF ELECTION RIGGING HAVE PROVOKED TALK IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS OF AN AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL,[ ]SAID THAT SUCH A RISK MUST BE TAKEN FOR THE SAKE OF DEMOCRACY. HE SAID THAT THE ONLY THING WHICH COULD SET THE SITUATION STRAIGHT WOULD BE A PUBLIC STATEMENT BY KY THAT HE WILL NOT RIG THE ELECTION, THAT HE FORBIDS ELECTION RIGGING BY HIS SUBORDINATES, AND THAT HE WILL PUNISH ANYONE WHO ENGAGES IN ELECTION FRAUD.

6. IT WAS NOT CLEAR TO EITHER EMBOFF PRECISELY WHAT[ ]WANTED AND HE SOUGHT OUT ONE EMBOFF AFTER ELEVEN IN THE EVENING. TWICE DURING THE CONVERSATIONS HE EDGED VERY CLOSE TO STATING THE

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BELIEF THAT THE US GOVERNMENT FAVORS A CONTINUATION OF THE
THIEU-KY REGIME. HE MAY THEREFORE SUSPECT THAT ADVICE
AGAINST BOAT-ROCKING IS MERELY A WAY OF SUPPORTING THIEU-
KY. ALSO CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE WAS SOME
HOPE THAT THE PRESS CONFERENCE MIGHT BE POSTPONED OR THE
TONE AT LEAST MODIFIED IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME UNSPECIFIED
ASSURANCES FROM THE UNITED STATES, BUT THIS WAS NOT
CLARIFIED.

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ACTION SS 70

INFO NSCE 00,CIAE 00,SSO 00,DODE 00,USIE 00,NSAE 00,CCO 00,/070 W

O R 151115Z AUG 67
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INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE 2170
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3802
AMCONSUL DANANG 729
CINCPAC

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 3150

LIMDIS

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7. IN AN EFFORT TO DETERMINE WHAT [redacted] WANTED AND ALSO TO TEST HUONG'S MOOD, EMBOFF STOPPED BY HUONG'S APARTMENT EARLY ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 15 BEFOE THE PRESS CONFERENCE. HUONG TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE IS DETERMINED THAT HE WILL NOT RPT NOT BE USED TO PROVIDE A COVER FOR THE LEGALIZATION OF AN ILLEGAL REGIME. HE MAY ULTIMATELY FEEL COMPELLED TO WITHDRAW FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE, THOUGH HE WILL NOT DO SO AT ONCE. HE NOTED THAT MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING [redacted] HAVE URGED HIM TO QUIT. HUONG REMINDED EMBOFF THAT HE HAD KEPT HIS

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WORD AND GOT THE CAMPAIGN RESTARTED (SAIGON 2945 AND 2970), AND HE HAD ALSO AVOIDED APPEARING AT THE AUGUST 14 JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE SO AS NOT TO HAVE TO EXPRESS CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, HE CANNOT REMAIN SILENT IF THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO EMPLOY UNFAIR TACTICS AGAINST HIM ANDIF THE MILITARY CONTINUE TO MAKE SUCH STATEMENS AS THAT BY GENERAL THANG ON AUGUST 13. EMBOFF POINTED OUT THE DAN-

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GER OF A REVULSION OF AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST OUR VIET NAM POLICY. EMBOFF ALSO NOTED THAT OUR SHARED ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE IS A FREE AND INDEPENDENT VIET NAM, AND IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS SHOULD NOT BLIND US TO GENERAL PROGRESS TOWARD THAT GOAL. HUONG REITERATED HIS DETERMAINATION TO CONTINUE THE CAMPAIGN AND COUPLED IT WITH ANOTHER EXPRESSION OF HIS DISTRESS OVER GENERAL THANG'S REMARKS.

8. ROTH [redacted] AND HUONG AIMED THEIR ATTACK SPECIFICALLY AT KY AND HIS SUPPORTERS AND TENDED TO EXONERATE THIEU. HUONG REMARKED THAT THIEU IS A VERY REASONABLE MAN, BUT EVERYONE HATES KY. b-1 ed

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9. COMMENT: (A) IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT SOME OF HUONG'S CHARGES ARE TRUE. EMBOFFS HAVE ENCOUNTERED PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CHIEFS WHOSE REMARKS SUGGESTED STRONGLY THAT THEY ARE NOT ABOVE SUCH TACTICS. THANG'S REMARKS ARE OF COURSE EXTREMELY UNFORTUNATE. WE DO NOT THINK THERE IS A GENERAL PLAN TO RIG THE ELECTION.

S, HOWEVER, AND EVEN THE STATEMENT READ AT THE HUONG PRESS CONFERENCES ONLY SAID THE ALLEGED INCIDENTS "MAY BE PART OF SUCH A GENERAL PLAN WHILE ALSO NOT NNJZH# POSSIBILITY THAT THEY STEM FROM THE ZEAL OF THE LOCAL AUTHORIATIES. IN THIS CONNECTION WE HAVE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE NUMEROUS IRREGULARITIES CHARGED IN VINH BINH PROVINCE (IN THE LETTER FROM A HUONG SUPPORTER). THE CHARGES SEEM RATHER UNLIKELY BECAUSE THE VINH BINH PROVINCE CHIEF IS HUONG'S SON-IN-LAW AND KNOWN TO BE A HUONG SUPPORTER. THE VINH BINH DEPUTY PROVINCE CHIEF FOR ADMINISTRATION (THE MAN WHO WOULD HAVE MOST TO DO WITH PROVINCIAL ELECTION ARRANGEMENTS) IS ALSO KNOWN AS A HUONG SUPPORTER.

(B) HUONG AND COMPANY PROBABLY THINK THAT HUONG'S ACTION IN MAKING SUCH PUBLIC CHARGES WILL FURTHER HIS IMAGE AS A COURAGEOUS MAN OF HIGH PRINCIPLE. THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS

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THUS PROBABLY AIMED AS MUCH AT WINNING VOTES AS AT FORCING THE MILITARY TO CEASE THEIR ALLEGED UNFAIR CAMPAIGN TACTICS.

(C) ALTHOUGH HUONG HAS NOW THREATENED PUBLICLY TO RECONSIDER HIS CANDIDACY, WE DO NOT THINK HIS WITHDRAWAL IS IMMINENT.

(D) WE ARE CHECKING THE CHARGE THAT AMERICAN HELICOPTERS HAVE BEEN USED TO TRANSPORT THIEU-KY CAMPAIGN WORKERS. THIS WOULD OF COURSE BE A DIRECT CONTRADICTION OF OUR POLICY AND OUR INSTRUCTIONS TO THE FIELD. WE WILL ALSO BE DISCREETLY INQUIRING INTO THE TRUTH OF THE OTHER SPECIFICATION ALLEGATIONS AND WILL REPORT ANY INFORMATION AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE.

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